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**Submission regarding the
“A SAFER COMMUNITY Discussion Paper” September 2014**

TO: The Hon Tony Piccolo, MP, Minister for Disabilities, Minister for Police, Minister for Correctional Services, Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Road Safety

Symbiotic relationships

The new model which seems to be emerging is that “front line” emergency services will remain unchanged and only “support services” will be amalgamated into one body, providing efficiencies in the process.

This model ignores the inter-dependent relationships between operational staff and support staff. These relationships are critical to the success of much of the work which is undertaken by the community safety, training and public relations sections of the existing agencies (- work in the areas of prevention, preparation and recovery).

For example

- The Community Education section of the MFS, part of Community Safety & Resilience, has developed a home fire safety education program which utilises operational staff as the “delivery backbone”. In this way we have a “workforce” of 1000 firefighters who deliver our community and school education programs. These firefighters have the benefit of operational experience to underwrite the education they are delivering and, just as important, the public credibility as a respected and trusted source of information – vital if behavioural change is to take place.
Every year we engage over 100,000 people in community education initiatives in this way.
- The Juvenile Firefighters Intervention Program (JFLIP) utilises a team of around 40 fully trained operational fire fighters who volunteer to work with families whose children have been experimenting with fire. The success of the Program arises from the training the firefighters receive and the credibility they bring to the Program. To enable JFLIP to continue it is vital that the co-ordinator of the Program has a direct and ongoing relationship with the practitioner team to provide support, direction, training and mentoring.
- The role of Public Relations also shares a symbiotic relationship with Operations. The ability to promote the work of the agency is dependent upon suitable information and material being provided by the operational workforce. That information flow only occurs when the person co-ordinating the interface between the public and the organisation is trusted and has positive relationships with the workforce. The Public Relations Officer at the MFS has the support of the entire workforce through the relationships she has built with Operations. Officers go out of their way to ensure that she has good material to work with and, because they are supported by her, they are also prepared to be part of media engagement.
A combined Emergency Service Public Relations team, comprising 6 or 7 people, was part of the initial SAFECOM structure and was an abject failure.

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Staff positions were transferred back to agencies after massive staff turnover left the MFS, CFS and SES exposed with only a couple of experienced officers keeping things afloat.

In situations where more than one incident is ongoing the agencies need their own agency-focussed teams to manage the media and public relations. The demand is too high and too specific to the agency.

- The Road Awareness Program (RAP) is another example of a community education program which heavily invests in the credibility of operational firefighters. It is a program which can't be run in isolation, divorced from the firefighters who deliver it.
- The work of the Built Environment Section of Community Safety & Resilience is also dependent upon the skills, experience and expertise of operational firefighters as a workforce. For more information refer to the submission received from Ms Amy Seppelt.

In any new structure it is vital that the functions of the Community Safety and Resilience Department (Community Education, Public Relations, Built Environment and Fire Cause Investigation) are all located with the operational functions of the service.

With respect, I request that the above comments be considered in relation to the emergency services sector review.

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